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THE DESCENT OF GRACE

Bruce Vance
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About the author: *Bruce Vance* is a free lance writer. He has published *Dreamscope: Voyage in an Alternate Reality*, Theosophical Publications, Quest Chicago, 1989, and *Mindscape: Exploring the Reality of Thought Forms*, Theosophical Publications, Quest, Chicago, 1990. He is also a subsistence farmer.

There is, in the descent of a gentle snow, a sure sign and symbol of divine grace. Snow fills the air and covers the land in the purity of white; it is silent in its approach, and silent in its arrival; it touches all things equally, bestowing its softening qualities on all. And though it appears to bring a sameness to all the world, on every point there is somewhat of a unique quality; in the absolute individuality of each flake is an image of the quality of grace which causes it to bestow its influence in a way adapted uniquely to each part and parcel of the creation.

This crystalline manna from heaven, once descended, has the power to take all harshness from the world. Each sharp edge, each jagged precipice, and each deep cleft is made smooth, soft, and a thing of beauty. The myriad barren twigs in the forest, once stark against the sky, become graceful supports and repositories, ready to yield their hoard in plummeting abundance with the first breath of wind. All the world is sculpted anew in curves of grace, in lines of gentleness. Where there was darkness, is now become light; where there was disharmony, there is now a conjoining into harmony.

Surely we are meant, through our beholding of a snowfall to learn of the nature of grace. Though it comes to us silently and softly, it has the power to change the world. It offers itself to all parts of the world, but is not accepted by all: the presence of a too earthly heat dispels somewhat its influence, though not altogether; too great an activity and too little receptivity gives it little chance to alight and make itself known; and too much soiling hides its beauty. In its purity it returns light like no other substance, even bringing light to the underside of things. There is this difference: grace, unlike the snow, descends always and everywhere.

We may see in the drifting of snow the accumulation of grace in those places safe and secure from too violent winds. In its capacity to take on new shapes under the guidance of careful hands, we may know of grace's receptivity to creative impulses. And through the child's love of snow we may witness something of divine play and joy in the shedding of grace. Further, the deep snow shelters tender plants from the too harsh elements of winter, as a conscious recognition and acceptance of grace shelters us from the sufferings attendant upon the harsher conditions of life.

Against the backdrop of this blanket of purity, each wayfarer is made to stand forth in greater relief. Each individual, be he gaunt or heavy, sad or gay, is

made prominent and obvious - a testament to the necessary character and unique importance of each person who journeys forth into the world, into the fields of grace. Thus does grace, in its omnipresence and homogeneity, support, maintain, and celebrate the individual and the unique. When we walk into a field blanketed with snow we know that we may be seen by even the most distant eyes.

In this vision of snow, in this image of grace, we are taught, as we are through so many things, that we are each of great worth. There is a measure of grace in all that we are and in all we receive. The gift of our life - our existence - should by itself declare to us our worth and necessity. The power to learn, to understand and to increase - what must our lives mean if we are given such powers. That we may love, hope and aspire, is the evidence and substance of the grace which indwells us. The gifts of sight, of hearing, of taste; the capacity to know the benefits of pleasure and pain, of humility and exaltation; an unimaginable power to create the new; - these all bear witness to the presence of grace, and to the corresponding importance of the individual who is designed to receive it.

We take for granted so much that is bestowed upon us. Everything we are, is given to us; our actions and our creations may be our own, but they are possible only through the auspices of the grace of our being. Rightfully do we go about our business, and rightfully do we engage ourselves in our lives; but it is also right that we should know to take a constant joy in the gifts that are ours. When in the folly of false pride we clutch our powers and claim them for ourselves, we narrow the gate of grace. In failing to continually acknowledge a greater source, we deny ourselves a measure of the influx of light which comes from that source. The light - the grace - is continually bestowed; but we also have the power to close ourselves to that very bestowal.

The greatest power and token of grace which we are given, is the power to fashion our own destinies. Yet our ability to do this is relative to our ability to avail ourselves of the universal force, to drink from the fountain of life which wells up within us. We may not drink from this fountain if we do not acknowledge its presence; neither may we know its bounty when we believe we are a fountain unto ourselves. All things rest upon and rise from the light of grace. Just as we are not self-created, neither are we self-maintaining.

To acknowledge our source and sustenance does in no way diminish our singularity and worth; rather does it enhance these. The fact that we are existent, continuous, and creative; that we are of worth in the vision of the All; that we have the power to accept inherent purpose to our being. When the snow falls we may seclude ourselves in some private, windowless room, and there ignore its effects - we will not be weakened appreciably by our avoidance of this vision of beauty; but if we close ourselves to the descent of grace, freely offered and ever present, then do we throw ourselves upon private resources unsustained by the universal; then do we discover our weakness when standing alone.

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